

payments on time and in full. Are some people having a hard time making these mortgage payments? Of course they are. Can the government help? Yes, in some cases. But I urge my colleagues to be very careful here. We do not need for the Federal Government to be the piggy bank for folks that made poor decisions or to bail out the lenders that made loans to people that really didn't have the capacity to pay it back. It is not fair to penalize those folks that made good decisions and played by the rules by taking their tax money and rewarding those who didn't.

For many of my constituents, they are having a hard time just making their own mortgage payment. What we shouldn't be doing is taking their tax money to pay their neighbor's payment.

Madam Speaker, I encourage folks to be very cautious about these bail-out programs.

STUDY REVEALS MIDDLE CLASS WORSE OFF THAN THEY WERE FIVE YEARS AGO

(Mr. PERLMUTTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PERLMUTTER. Madam Speaker, 7 years of President Bush's economic policies have put a tremendous strain on middle-class families. Since 2001, health care premiums have gone up almost \$6,000, college tuition has increased by \$2,500, and gas prices have more than doubled. With these increases and paychecks that have, on the average, fallen, it's no wonder that the majority of Americans say their economic situation has not improved in the last 5 years.

While the Bush administration is eager to give tax breaks to the wealthiest of Americans and assist Wall Street firms like Bear Stearns, it does little to help middle-class families. Madam Speaker, the Democratic House recognizes the immediate need to help middle-class families, and that is why our budget prioritized middle-class tax relief and why we are proposing a second economic stimulus package.

It's time for President Bush to put the middle class ahead of the wealthiest few.

WHEN WILL THE DEMOCRAT LEADERSHIP KEEP ITS COMMITMENT TO RURAL COMMUNITIES

(Mr. WALDEN of Oregon asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WALDEN of Oregon. Madam Speaker, by refusing to renew the county payments program, Congress has broken its pledge to rural areas all across this country like Grant County, Oregon, where Federal land covers 61 percent of the county. That's 300 square miles larger than the entire State of Delaware.

The school children of Grant County rely on the Federal Government to be a

good neighbor. During my most recent visit to Prairie City School and the eighth grade class of Andy Demko, I was told by the school superintendent, Newell Cleaver, that only the county payments funds through the Road Department have kept the schools going.

Our Speaker has said she would like this to be "The Children's Congress." So why won't the Democratic leadership bring a vote on H.R. 3058, which is a bipartisan, 4-year reauthorization timber program, keeping a 100-year-old commitment from this government to these counties?

It has been 112 days since H.R. 3058 was made eligible for a vote. It's here on the Union Calendar of the House. We have had 51 legislative days when it could have been brought up for a vote to help secure rural schools, and yet the leadership of this House refuses to even schedule it for a vote on the House floor.

When will the Democrat leadership of the House keep its commitment to rural communities?

URGING THE PRESIDENT TO STOP FILLING THE STRATEGIC PETROLEUM RESERVE

(Mr. WILSON of Ohio asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. WILSON of Ohio. Madam Speaker, as gas prices have once again hit record highs, congressional Democrats are urging President Bush to take action. For 7 years he has sat on the sidelines, and even last week at a press conference in the Rose Garden, he concluded that the cost-benefit analysis of immediate action for consumers were not persuasive enough for him to act.

House Democrats are calling on President Bush to stop filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. This reserve is 97 percent full, which is more than enough to meet any emergency we would have. Experts believe that tapping the reserve could lower our gas prices by as much as 5 cents to 25 cents per gallon.

Right now, Americans need help. They're hurting. President Bush could take action today that would provide immediate relief to consumers at the pump, but he refuses to act. Once again, House Democrats urge the President to reconsider.

HOOSIERS VOTE WITH MORE CONFIDENCE TODAY

(Mr. PENCE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PENCE. Madam Speaker, today America's eyes are turning to Indiana and North Carolina as tens of thousands of Americans are making their decision in primary election days. And thanks to the United States Supreme Court decision in Crawford v. Marion County Election Board, et al., Hoosiers will be voting today with greater confidence than ever before.

The Supreme Court decided last week in a 6-3 decision that Indiana's laws requiring photo identification to vote is constitutional. In its opinion, the Supreme Court noted, "There is no question about the legitimacy or importance of a State's interest in counting only eligible voters' votes." It further stated, "Indiana's interest in protecting public confidence in elections, while closely related to its interest in preventing voter fraud, has independent significance, because such confidence encourages citizen participation in the democratic process."

Indiana's laws had its critics in this body, but I rise to extol the Supreme Court and all of those in Indiana and North Carolina who, with greater confidence today, will exercise their franchise and guide America's future integrity.

TIME FOR ACTION ON RECORD GAS PRICES

(Mr. WELCH of Vermont asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELCH of Vermont. Madam Speaker, for the past 7 years, President Bush has been delivering an energy policy that has resulted in the highest increase in the cost of energy in the history of this country. Last week, the President continued his call for more of the same when he touted an old plan for domestic drilling in the Arctic that would produce a 6-month supply of oil 10 years from now. It is not going to do anything about the price at the pump now, it is not going to do anything about the price at the pump later.

Instead, the President is blaming congressional Democrats for not addressing the problem, but it's the President who won't suspend purchases of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve which would bring down prices 25 cents immediately. It's the President who won't work with us to get rid of the Enron loophole which is enriching speculators and clobbering middle class families.

This year, in fact, the Democratic Congress has passed energy legislation that's getting nowhere because of being held hostage in the Senate and it has no support from the President of the United States.

The reality is that we have actions we can take in the short term, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the Enron loophole, and in the long term, to reduce our reliance on carbon.

INVEST IN AMERICAN ENERGY INDEPENDENCE

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Madam Speaker, Americans are paying the price at the pump for the inaction of this majority. Democrats promised

the American people 2 years ago last week that they had a plan to address rising gas prices. It appears that plan was nothing more than election year politics. That's a shame because right now, Americans are paying nearly \$4 a gallon for gas. The effect of these rising prices is felt not just when we fill up our tank. We see the rising prices at the grocery store because our food is shipped in trucks all across this country.

The American people do not expect a quick fix, but they do expect us to work toward energy independence rather than simply pointing fingers and blame. We live in a global market and many nations are competing for oil. Let's start by promoting American alternative energy. Let's invest in American oil. Let's advance American energy exploration. The co-ops of America, led by National President Jack Wolfe, are leading the way.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September the 11th.

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COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING REFORM

(Mr. HODES asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. HODES. Madam Speaker, there's no doubt that the housing crisis and the consumer credit crunch are getting worse. Last week, we learned that the number of homes facing foreclosure more than doubled from last year. In my home State of New Hampshire, foreclosures have increased nearly 96 percent.

That is why it is so important that Congress pass the comprehensive housing package that is coming to the floor this week. The legislation is the most innovative and comprehensive solution to the housing crisis yet. It will give relief to the millions of working families struggling to pay their mortgage with the rising price of gas and food. It would help nearly 1.5 million Americans in need. Our package would also offer assistance to State and localities to purchase and rehabilitate foreclosed properties.

Madam Speaker, our economy cannot rebound unless we act now to give relief to millions of Americans in need. We have a bold proposal to take this decisive action. I certainly hope that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle understand the urgent need and that we will receive bipartisan support for this proposal.

POLL RESULTS: MEDIA NOT OBJECTIVE

(Mr. SMITH of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Madam Speaker, during a telephone town meeting

last night, I asked my constituents, "Do you think the media are fair and objective in their news coverage?" Ninety-one percent of the almost 400 respondents said the media are not fair, and only 7 percent said that they are fair.

This is an amazing result but not a surprising one, since slanted coverage pervades much of the news Americans get every day.

One of the greatest threats America faces is a biased media. If the American people don't get the facts, they can't make good decisions. And if they can't make good decisions, we won't have a democracy.

The national media need to let the American people make up their own minds, not tell them what to think.

ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

(Mr. COSTA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. COSTA. Madam Speaker, today we have an opportunity to signify an important milestone in Israel's history. We celebrate its 60th anniversary, a truly important time in Jewish history.

My district in the San Joaquin Valley is the bread basket of the Nation, but we have a unique relationship between California State University at Fresno and Ben Gurion University of the Negev. My constituents for years have been partnering with their counterparts in Israel to research water, irrigation technologies and agricultural solutions to problems that face our world.

Fresno State has a long history in working with many leading drip and micro-irrigation equipment manufacturers in Israel, and the university has a long history of exchange of information with the Agricultural Research Organization's Volcani Center in Israel, including exchange programs that have brought research scientists to work on water and salinity issues.

Fresno State continues today to have discussions with Israeli researchers and industry on how to extend a beneficial use of the world's ever shrinking supply of water for the important purpose of feeding our world.

For this and many other reasons, we recognize and celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Nation of Israel.

FAILURE TO PASS THE COLOMBIA TRADE AGREEMENT HAS INCREASED THE COST OF U.S. EXPORTS BY MORE THAN \$1 BILLION

(Mr. WELLER of Illinois asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WELLER of Illinois. Madam Speaker, I rise today to ask this House, why do we continue to punish Illinois and U.S. manufacturers and farmers?

In the 531 days since the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement was signed, U.S. products exported to Colombia have suffered over \$1 billion in taxes and tariffs because they were exported to the United States through Colombia. And during that period of time, Colombian products entering the United States come in duty free. That doesn't seem fair.

We have an agreement with Colombia to eliminate those tariffs, and every day we delay it costs almost \$190 million a week in higher tariffs on U.S.-made products.

The U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement is good for States like Illinois. I represent a State that's dependent on exports. Our biggest product we produce in the district I represent, we have 8,000 union workers who produce yellow bulldozers and construction equipment, something that's common and in need in places like Colombia.

Let's be competitive. Let's eliminate those tariffs. Let's bring up for a vote the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement.

NATIONAL TEACHER DAY

(Mrs. CAPPS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. CAPPS. Madam Speaker, on this National Teacher Day, I rise to single out just one of the many talented teachers in my congressional district.

Libby Anderson teaches second grade at Grover Heights Elementary School in Grover Beach. It's a national blue ribbon school. She is one of those gifted teachers with a truly unique way of igniting the interest of her students.

A few years ago, she led a class project where each student picked a lighthouse to study from around the country. Through that project one student learned of the Federal efforts to restore the Piedras Blancas lighthouse in my district.

Under her guidance, the class embarked on a campaign called "Pennies for Piedras" to raise money toward this effort. By the end of that school year, the students had raised \$1,337.30 in pennies.

I'm happy to say that her students have gone on to lead support for continued restoration of this special place.

This is just one example of the many exceptional ways this teacher touched the lives of her students and expanded their awareness of their community.

Our country is blessed to have teachers like Ms. Anderson who spark students' passions, encouraging them to get involved in the world around them.

ENERGY PRICES

(Mr. LATTA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LATTA. Madam Speaker, with no relief in sight for the American public as they continue to endure the costs